

Exploring Ephesians

Introduction

- Will be studying a pericope or passage in Ephesians
- Before we get there will look at the context within which the pericope is positioned to ensure we understand the message being conveyed correctly.
- To begin with will briefly look at a few concepts to assist as we approach the Bible desiring to rightly divide the word of God.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Tim 2:15 NKJV)

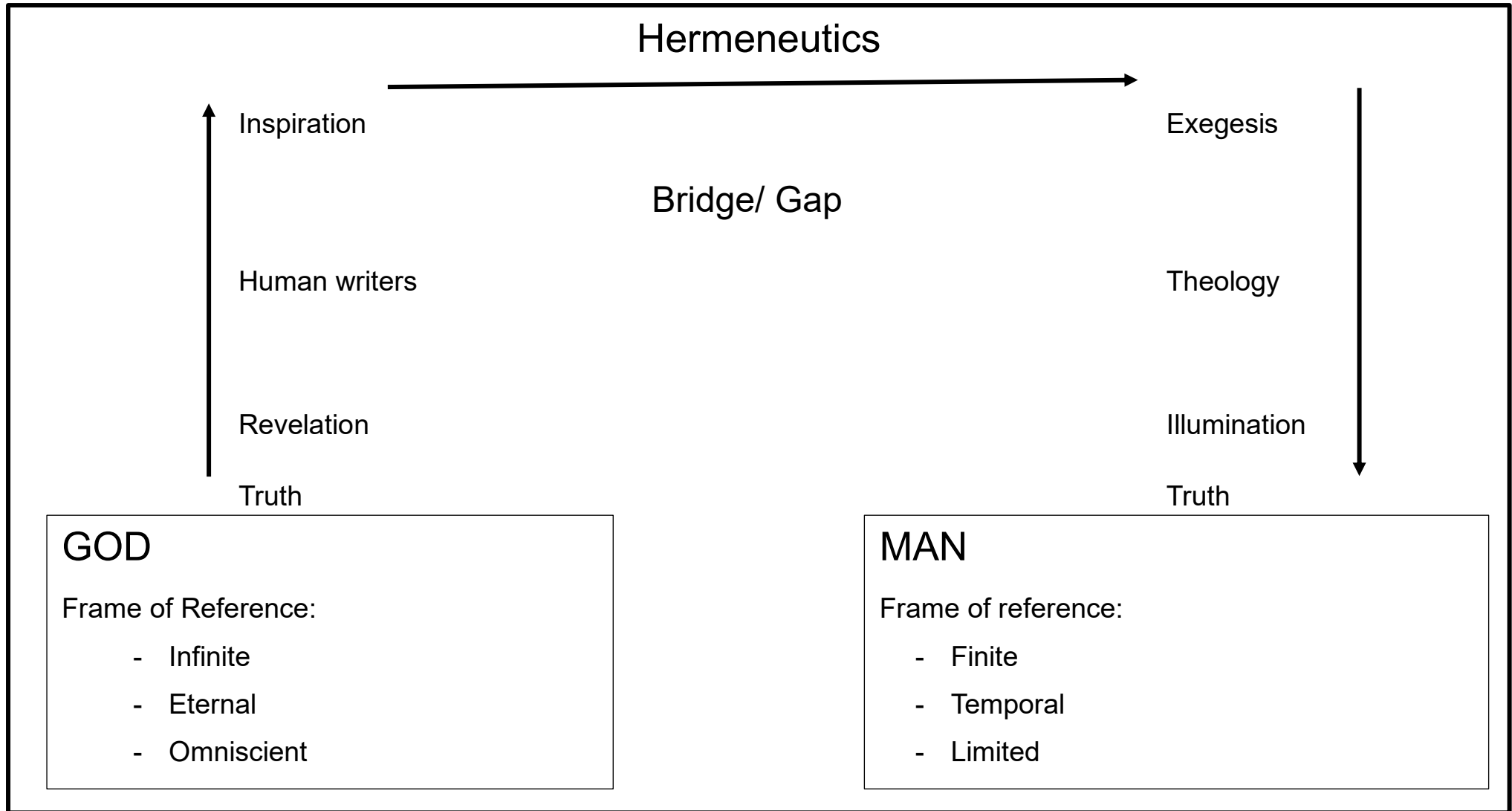
Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. (ESV)

Work hard so you can present yourself to God and receive his approval. Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth. (NLT)

Rightly Handling the Word

This begins with understanding how to approach the Word of God as we seek to understand what it is saying to us and how we are to apply it in our everyday lives.

Figure 1. The Communication of Scripture



Bridge/Gap:

Before we approach the Word of God, it is important to understand the bridge or gap that we need to cross in order to rightly handle the Word.

a. Contextual gap

Experiences, vocabulary, emotions, value system, education, environment, attitudes, current theology

b. Linguistic gap

Figures of speech; literary expression (allegories, riddles, etc)

c. Cultural gap

d. Geographical gap

e. Historical gap

Political, economic and religious

For example, A portion of scripture that is often misunderstood due to a lack of understanding of the biblical context is **Jeremiah 29:11**. The verse says:

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future”. (NIV)

While this verse is often quoted in times of uncertainty to offer comfort and hope, it's important to recognize the context in which it was written. Jeremiah 29:11 is part of a letter from the prophet Jeremiah to the Jewish exiles in Babylon. The people were in a difficult, long-term exile, and the letter essentially says that, despite their current suffering, God still has a plan for them to eventually prosper and return to their homeland—but it's not an immediate promise of deliverance.

The message was not about individual prosperity or avoiding hardship, but about a collective future hope for Israel as a nation, even though they had to endure the consequences of their sin and the exile. The broader context includes God telling them to build houses, plant gardens, and pray for the peace of the city they were in,

implying that they should settle in and make the best of their situation while waiting for God's future restoration.

So, taken out of context, Jeremiah 29:11 might suggest an immediate, personal promise of blessings, while the original context reflects a much longer, communal journey with suffering before restoration.

Bible Translations

Different translation philosophies when it comes to bible translations. What does this refer to? It refers to the philosophy of the translator when he was rendering the original document and what the goal of the translation is, i.e. what it is to be used for.

a. Formal equivalence translation philosophy (Literal philosophy)

- Linguistic
- Word for word, structure for structure
- The original words (form and arrangement) are kept as close as possible to the original biblical text and structure.
- Word for word correspondence
- The literal philosophy renders the text in such a way as to retain the original culture and worldview.
- The gaps need to be further explored for understanding
- Good for academics

But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. (Jon 3:8 NKJV)

- “sackcloth”
- It’s an expression of sorrow, repentance and remorse. In literal translation, it doesn’t matter to the translator if the term will evoke the same meaning to the reader as they want to reader to dig deeper and explore the original culture.
- Idioms are left and are translated literally
- ESV; NKJV; NRSV; NASV; NIV

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. (Rom 3:28 NKJV)

b. Dynamic equivalence philosophy

- Thought for thought
- Meaning of the author conveyed by translator into recipient's language
- Good for devotion
- The translators aim is to convey the message that the original biblical writer wanted to convey to his audience without necessarily maintaining the original form and structure.
- The translator is free to change the original idioms and structure to ensure the same original message is conveyed.

Eg Jonah 3:8

People and animals alike must wear garments of mourning, and everyone must pray earnestly to God. They must turn from their evil ways and stop all their violence. (NLT)

The translator will render the term “sackcloth” in such a way as to evoke the same response in our current culture as “sackcloth” would have evoked in the requisite biblical era.

- This translation is useful in making difficult theological concepts clear.

For example:

So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law. (NLT)

- The translator is not concerned about using the original form and structure and idioms as the original text.
- NLT; CEV; TPT
- Good for devotion

This is important to bear in mind as we approach the Bible and as we seek to understand what it is saying to us today in our current culture.

With this in mind, we will begin our study of Ephesians.

The Book of Ephesians: General background

1. Authorship

The author identifies himself as Paul (Eph 1:1; 3:1). However, the authorship of Ephesians has been disputed since the end of the eighteenth century for several reasons including the language, grammar and theology. Some scholars find the disparity between the language and grammar of undisputed epistles to that of Ephesians too large for the author to be the same. For some scholars, the impersonal tone of the letter with no greeting, and few details given regarding the audience and the author's context, raise question marks as to the book's authorship. Pseudonymity was not uncommon in the ancient world and is a possibility. However, Ephesians expresses the very heart of Paul regardless of the long sentences and stylistic differences from his other letters, and these questions regarding Pauline authorship seem to have been adequately answered by several scholars. Thus, the authorship of Ephesians by Paul is currently accepted in many academic circles.

2. Date of writing

Paul indicated that he was writing from prison (Eph 3:1; 4:1). According to scholars, this imprisonment could have been one of three locations:

- Ephesus AD 52-56 (1 Cor 15:32),
- Caesarea AD 57-59 (Act 24:27)
- or Rome AD 60-62 (Act 28:30) .

It would be unlikely for Paul to write to the Ephesian Christians if he was imprisoned in their midst. Paul speaks of multiple imprisonments (2 Cor 11:23), and of facing "wild beasts in Ephesus" (1 Cor 15:32), but nowhere is there specific reference to imprisonment in Ephesus. Paul spent two years as a prisoner in Caesarea before being sent to Rome (Act 24:27). The circumstances of Paul's house arrest in Rome (Act 28:30), with his freedom to receive visitors and preach and teach point to Rome as the location of writing. Along with this, there is evidence to suggest both Colossians, Philemon and Ephesians were likely written during the same period at

the same location. Thus, the most widely accepted location and date of writing amongst scholars is Paul's house arrest in Rome around AD 60-62.

3. Recipients

Ephesians appears to be the most general of Paul's letters. He greets no one, thanks no one and only mentions Tychicus by name. The words "*ἐν Ἐφέσῳ*" (in Ephesus) in the letter's first sentence provide the sole indicator in the letter that it was intended for Ephesus, and those words are not present in some of the letter's most reliable manuscripts. However, it is widely accepted that this letter would have been written to the church in Ephesus and circulated to the churches in outlying areas in the province of Asia most likely western Asia Minor.

4. Historical context

a. Occasion

Identifying the occasion for the book of Ephesians is challenging. The epistle is the most general of the Pauline epistles, with no specific problems addressed, and no sense of urgency conveyed. The lack of specific details with respect to the audience results in a plethora of ideas regarding the circumstances which prompted the penning of Ephesians. However, Ephesians does seem to have been written primarily to Gentile Christians (Eph 2:11–12; 3:1; 4:17). Whatever the occasion was that prompted the writing of Ephesians, the result was an epistle with a general set of concerns. Paul may have intended this letter to be read in various congregations in and around the geographical location of Ephesus, or perhaps the intended recipients included those in the surrounding areas of Ephesus and even western Asia Minor.

b. Purpose

There are various propositions from scholars regarding the purpose of the book of Ephesians. Several key themes emerge:

- Encouraging and strengthening Gentile Christians, reminding them of their place in God's plan and urging them to live in accordance with it.
- Promoting unity between Jewish and Gentile Christians, affirming their new identity in Christ, and encouraging holiness in their lifestyles.

- Fostering love among Christians, grounded in God's love, and emphasizing peace and unification through Christ.
- Offering a general letter that provides believers with strength, knowledge of salvation, and teachings on the Church.
- Addressing concerns of church unity and Christian conduct in areas such as speech, sexuality, and household relationships.
- Overall, the letter emphasizes believers' new identity in Christ, the spiritual battle against darkness, love and unity among Christians, and the ethical responsibilities that stem from these truths, especially in everyday Christian life.

5. Literary context

- Ephesians doesn't follow the typical structure of Paul's letters. It begins and ends like a letter but has long sentences and digressions that can confuse the reader.
- Some scholars argue this structure challenges Pauline authorship, but others suggest it's based on ancient Greek communication styles, where long sentences were seen as interconnected thoughts rather than confusing digressions.
- For example, Eph 1:3-14, though a long sentence in English, would have been understood as a unified thought in Greek with natural pauses.

a. The nature of Ephesians

- Ephesians is considered more obscure and slower-paced than Paul's other writings. It contains lexical and grammatical ambiguities that can make it difficult to understand.
- Some scholars view Ephesians more as a sermon than a letter.

b. Structure of Ephesians:

Chapters 1-3

Focus on the blessings God has given to Christians. These chapters describe God's mercy, love, salvation, the household of God, and the wisdom of God revealed to heavenly powers.

Chapters 4-6

Focus on how Christians should respond to these blessings through their attitudes and actions in everyday life.

c. Scholarly Perspectives on Structure:

Brown (2016)

- Chapters 1-3 are **indicative** (describing what God has done).
- Chapters 4-6 are **imperative** (providing instructions for Christian living based on God's blessings).

Neufeld (2002)

- Chapters 1-3 are **epideictic** (strengthening the audience's understanding and convictions).
- Chapters 4-6 are **deliberative** (motivating the audience to act based on these truths).

Martin (1991)

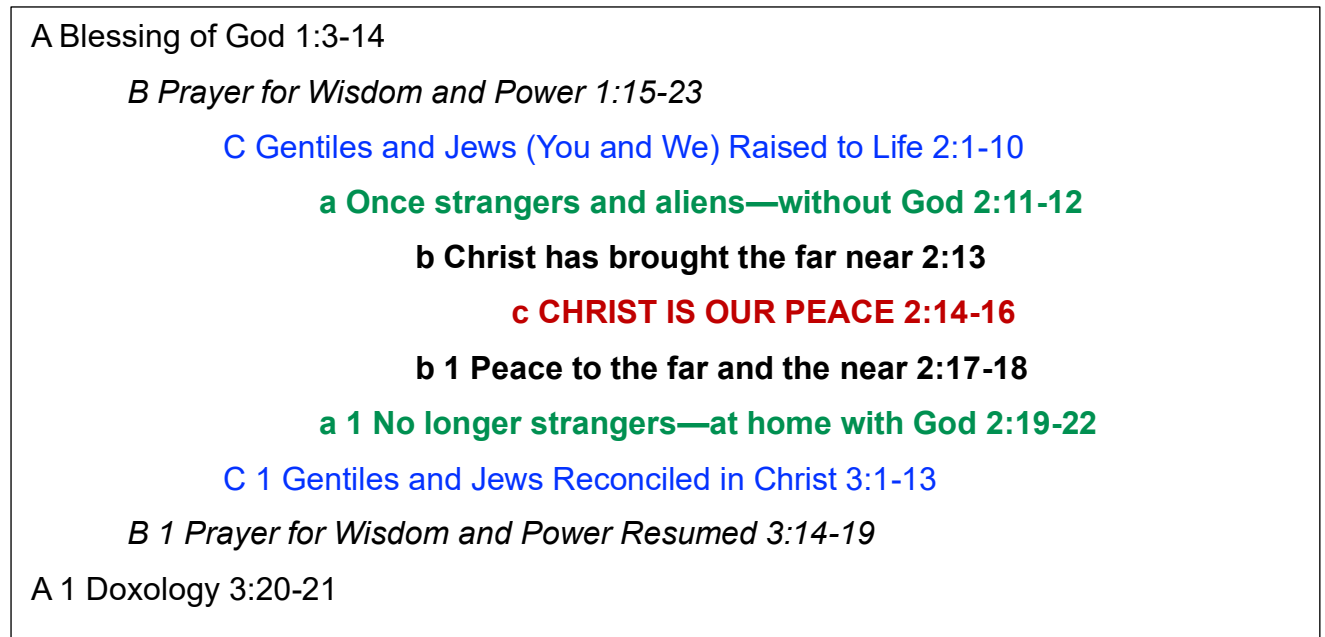
- Views Ephesians as a **diptych** (a two-panel work).
- **Panel A** (Chapters 1-3): Thanksgiving and worship for what God has done.
- **Panel B** (Chapters 4-6): Exhortation to live in a way worthy of what God has done.

d. Literary Devices:

Chiasm (Chiasmus):

- The first half of Ephesians features literary artistry, using **chiasm** (a pattern shaped like the Greek letter "X") to highlight central ideas.
- Eph 2:11-22 is often considered the central focus of this chiasm, with some suggesting the entire passage from Eph 1:3-3:21 follows a chiasmic structure.

Figure 2: Diagrammatic Representation of a Chiasm in the First Half of Ephesians (Neufeld 2002, 21)



This clearly illustrates that Ephesians is not haphazard, or random and disorganized. Despite its difficulties and long sentences, it does contain intentional structure and design.

A structured Outline of Ephesians

Drawing on Cohick (2010, 9), Merkle (2016, 24), Turaki (2010, 1452), and Hayford (1991, 1784-1797) a structured outline of the complete epistle to the Ephesians was collated. Please refer to Figure 2 to view this.

Figure 3. A structured outline of the complete epistle to the Ephesians

Greeting	(1:1-2)
The believer's position in Christ	(1:3-3:21)
<i>Believer's position: chosen, redeemed and sealed</i>	<i>(1:3-23)</i>
Chosen by the Father	(1:3-6)
Redeemed by the Son	(1:7-12)
Sealed by the Spirit	(1:13-14)
Thanksgiving and prayer	(1:15-23)
<i>Believer's position: alive with Christ</i>	<i>(2:1-10)</i>
Old condition: dead to God	(2:1-3)
New condition: alive to God	(2:4-10)
<i>Believer's position: united in one Body</i>	<i>(2:11-22)</i>
Remember your past situation	(2:11-13)
Remember Christ is your peace	(2:14-18)
Remember your new status in Christ	(2:19-22)
<i>Believer's position: equal in the Body</i>	<i>(3:1-21)</i>
The stewardship of the mystery	(3:1-7)
Proclamation of the mystery	(3:8-13)
Prayer	(3:14-21)
Walk worthy of your calling	(4:1-6:20)
<i>Walk in unity</i>	<i>(4:1-6)</i>
<i>Walk in diversity</i>	<i>(4:7-16)</i>
<i>Walk according to the new life</i>	<i>(4:17-32)</i>
<i>Walk in love, imitating God</i>	<i>(5:1-7)</i>
<i>Walk in light</i>	<i>(5:8-14)</i>
<i>Walk in wisdom</i>	<i>(5:15-21)</i>
<i>Walk wisely in relationships (household code)</i>	<i>(5:22-6:9)</i>
Husbands and wives	(5:23-33)
Parents and children	(6:1-4)
Bondservants and masters	(6:5-9)
<i>Walk wisely in warfare</i>	<i>(6:10-20)</i>
Benediction	(6:21-24)

The Logical flow of the Book

Ephesians offers a detailed synopsis of the Gospel, moving from worship and reflection on God's redemption to describing God's ongoing work through the Holy Spirit and a vision for the Church.

The letter is typically divided into:

- Doctrine (Chapters 1-3): Focuses on God's blessings and salvation.
- Ethics (Chapters 4-6): Provides practical instructions for Christian living.

Chapter 1: Praise and Blessing:

- Starts with praise to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- Focuses on God the Father, who redeemed and created a new people for Himself in Christ.
- The blessing (Eph 1:3-14) describes how God has blessed both Jews and Gentiles, chosen them, and is uniting all things through Christ.
- Thanksgiving and Prayer (1:15-23): Paul prays for wisdom and understanding for the Ephesians, highlighting their hope, inheritance, and God's power towards them.

Chapters 2-3: Salvation and Unity in Christ:

- Salvation by Grace: Believers are made alive in Christ, saved by grace through faith, and created for good works (2:1-10).
- Unity of Jew and Gentile: Gentiles, once outsiders, are brought near by Christ's blood and reconciled with Jews into one body (2:11-22).
- Paul's Mission: Paul shares the mystery of Christ, where Gentiles are fellow heirs with Jews in the promise of Christ (3:1-6).
- Spiritual Wisdom: God's wisdom is displayed through the Church to heavenly powers (3:10-11)
- Paul's Prayer (3:14-21): Paul prays for strength, love, and fullness of God for the Ephesians

Chapters 4-6: Application – How to Live:

Walking in the Faith: The word "walk" appears throughout these chapters, symbolizing how to live out Christian truths.

Five Areas of Instruction:

- Unity (4:1-16): Living in harmony as one body in Christ.
- Holiness (4:17-32): Living a life of purity and righteousness.
- Love (5:1-6): Loving one another as Christ loved us.
- Light (5:7-14): Walking as children of light, avoiding darkness.
- Wisdom (5:15-6:9): Living wisely, with instructions for relationships and household conduct.
- Spiritual Warfare (6:10-18): Paul instructs the Ephesians to be strengthened in the Lord and put on the full armor of God to stand against evil.
- Final Blessing (6:23-24): The letter ends with a blessing for peace and grace.

Ephesians blends doctrinal teaching with practical living, guiding believers in both understanding their salvation and applying it in their daily lives.

6. Emerging theological themes

a. Reconciliation and Unity:

A key theme in Ephesians is the reconciliation of both Jews and Gentiles through Christ, creating one unified humanity. This reconciliation brings believers together as one body in Christ.

b. The Trinity:

- Ephesians emphasizes the work of the Trinity—God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- God the Father is seen as the Creator and the one who blesses and adopts us in Christ.
- The Holy Spirit empowers believers and seals them in salvation.
- Jesus Christ is portrayed as Lord, exalted above all powers, and central to salvation.

c. Christology:

Christ is shown as the exalted Lord, seated at the right hand of God and having authority over all things. His victory over evil powers through the cross makes reconciliation with God and one another possible.

d. Salvation (Soteriology):

Ephesians presents a rich view of salvation, highlighting themes like redemption, grace, chosen and predestined status, and being raised in Christ to sit in heavenly places. Believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of their salvation.

e. The Church (Ecclesiology):

The Church is described as the Body of Christ, with Christ as its head. The Church grows into maturity as believers use their gifts to build each other up.

f. Sanctification:

Paul urges believers to put off the old self and live as the new self, reflecting their new life in Christ through their actions and attitudes.

g. Spiritual Warfare:

Ephesians recognizes the real presence of evil powers but emphasizes that Christ has triumphed over them. Believers are equipped with the armour of God to stand firm in spiritual battles.

h. Fatherhood of God:

The fatherhood of God is highlighted throughout, as God is presented as the loving Father who adopts believers as His children.

In summary, Ephesians touches on themes like reconciliation, the Trinity, Christ's victory, salvation, the Church, sanctification, and spiritual warfare, all woven together to instruct believers on how to live out their new identity in Christ.

Conclusion

Authorship:

- The author identifies as **Paul**, though authorship has been disputed since the 18th century.
- Despite debates, many scholars accept **Paul's authorship** based on the content and themes of the letter.

Date and Location:

- Written around **AD 60-62** during **Paul's house arrest in Rome**.

Recipients:

- The letter is widely accepted as being written to the **church in Ephesus** and surrounding churches in the **province of Asia**.
- Although the phrase “ἐν Ἐφέσῳ” (in Ephesus) appears in some manuscripts and is missing from others.

Historical Context:

- The letter most likely addresses primarily **Gentile Christians**, without focusing on specific problems or urgent issues.
- It deals with general **Christian concerns** such as:
 - **Christian identity** in Christ
 - **Love and unity** between Jews and Gentiles
 - **Theological and ethical responsibilities** in everyday Christian life

Structure and Flow of Thought:

Ephesians is divided into **two main halves**:

- **Chapters 1-3**: Focus on **God's blessings** for Christians.
- **Chapters 4-6**: Provide instructions on the **Christian response** to those blessings, outlining how Christians should live.

Practical Christian Living (Chapters 4-6):

- Walk in **love** (Eph. 5:1-21)
- Guidelines for **married couples** and **families** (Eph. 5:22-6:4)
- Relationships between **slaves and masters** (Eph. 6:5-9)
- **Spiritual warfare** (Eph. 6:10-18)
- The letter ends with a **blessing** (Eph. 6:23-24).

Major Theological Themes:

- **Reconciliation and Unity** (Jew and Gentile unity in Christ)
- **The Trinity** (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)
- **Fatherhood of God**
- **Christology** (The nature and work of Christ)
- **Pneumatology** (The Holy Spirit's role)
- **Soteriology** (Salvation)
- **Sanctification** (Living a holy life)
- **Ecclesiology** (The Church as the Body of Christ)
- **Spiritual Warfare** (Christian's victory over evil)

This structure and these themes guide the Christian understanding of identity, behaviour, and spiritual life according to Ephesians.

Bibliography

- Arnold, Clinton. 2010. *Ephesians. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Breck, John. 1994. *The Shape of Biblical Language: Chiasmus in the Scriptures and Beyond*. Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.
- Boaheng, Isaac. 2024. *A Guide to Academic Research and Writing in Theological and Religious Studies*. Ghana: Noyam.
- Brown, Raymond E. 2016. *An Introduction to the New Testament. The Abridged Edition*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Brown, D. R., Custis, M., & Whitehead, M. M. 2013. *Ephesians* (D. Mangum, Ed.). Bellingham: Lexham Press.
- Clarke, Andrew D. 1998. "Be Imitators of me': Paul's model of Leadership." *Tyndale Bulletin* 49(2):329-360.
- Cohick, Lyn H. 2010. *Ephesians: A New Covenant Commentary*. Eugene: Cascade Books.
- Fowl, Stephen E. 2012. *Ephesians: A Commentary*. Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Gombis, Timothy G. 2010. *The Drama of Ephesians: Participating in the Triumph of God*. Illinois: Intervarsity Press.
- Hayford, Jack D. 1991. *The Spirit Filled Life Bible: NKJV*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.
- Hoehner, Harold W. 2002. *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Kuo, Jason, C. 2016. "Ephesians, Letter to the." In *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, edited by John D. Barry. Washington: Lexham Press.
- Kitchen, Martin. 1994. *Ephesians*. London: Routledge.

- Leedy, Paul D. 1993. *Practical Research: Planning and Design* (5th ed). New York: Macmillan.
- Lopez, Rene A. 2011. "Views on Paul's vice lists and inheriting the Kingdom." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168(Jan-Mar):81-97.
- Lund, Nils W. 1942. *Chiasmus in the New Testament: A Study in Formgeschichte*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Martin, Ralph P. 1991. *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. Interpretation*. Atlanta: John Knox.
- Merkle, Benjamin L. 2016. *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament: Ephesians*. Nashville: B&H Academic.
- Metzger BM. 1994. *A textual commentary on the Greek New Testament, second edition a companion volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (4th rev. ed.)*. New York: United Bible Societies.
- Neufeld, Thomas R. 2002. *Ephesians (Believer's Church Bible Commentary)*. Waterloo: Herald Press.
- O'Brien, Peter. 1999. *The Letter to the Ephesians*. Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Olson Jon, C. 2018. "Intertextuality, Paul within Judaism, and the Biblical Witness against Same-Sex Practice." *Evangelical Quarterly* 89(3):222-239.
- Osborne, Grant. 2017. *Ephesians: Verse by Verse*. New Testament Commentaries. Bellingham: Lexham Press.
- RES4122 Research Methodology Study Guide 2021. Johannesburg, South Africa: South African Theological Seminary Press.
- Salmond, S. D. F. (n.d.). The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians. In *The Expositor's Greek Testament: Commentary* (Vol. 3). New York: George H. Doran Company.
- Schreiner TR. 2011. *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles (2nd Edition)*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic. Logos Edition.

- Smith, Kevin G. 2008. *Academic Writing and Theological Research: A Guide for Students*. Johannesburg, South Africa: South African Theological Seminary Press.
- Smith, Kevin G 2018. "Semantic Diagramming". Accessed from BIB4123 Ephesians: The Unified Church, a course of the South African Theological Seminary.
- Smith, Kevin G. 2020. "Walking through Ephesians". YouTube videos. South African Theological Seminary. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-ekyFiQh0I&list=PL-yns_avZ1rRbc5kr7CryaSOT-V_jtX7K&index=9
- Smith, Kevin G. 2020. "Walking through Ephesians". YouTube videos. South African Theological Seminary. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dyPMT7wLyIQ&list=PL-yns_avZ1rRbc5kr7CryaSOT-V_jtX7K&index=10
- Thielman, Frank. 2010. *Ephesians*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Turaki, Y. 2010. *Ephesians*. In Africa Bible Commentary. Logos edition, 1451–64. Nairobi: Word Alive.
- Vyhmeister, Nancy Jean. 2001. *Quality Research Papers for Students of Religion and Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.